THE HINDU
Sunday, October 26, 2025

magazine

backpage
Varnam, a blueprint on creating a cult brand
GO TO » PAGE 8

INSIDE
Diane Keaton and the quiet power of refusing to fit in
GO TO » PAGE 4

LITERARY REVIEW
Journalist Harinder Baweja on her four-decade journey
GO TO » PAGE 3

Track the latest stories via #ThMagazine on Instagram and X (formerly Twitter) Get connected » www.thehindu.com

Panruti jackfruit, which got its GI tag in April; a Kashmiri woman making pashmina; and an artisan painting a Kondapalli toy.
(RAJESH N., NISSAR AHMAD AND VIJAYA BHASKAR CH.)

INSIDE INDIA'S RACE FOR THE GI TAG

Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal has announced a target of 10,000 GI tags by 2030, but do its beneficiaries understand what the tag can do, and what else must be added to it?

One of the challenges [of GI] lies in how the registration system is structured — recognition and associated rights are often granted primarily to societies or cooperatives. This leaves out many grassroots artisans, as well as NGOs and trusts like ours, who have been actively working on revival and sustainability

HEMALATHA JAIN
Founder of Punarjeevana Trust, which has been working on revival efforts of several Karnataka handlooms, especially the chequered Patteda Anchu sari

Sohini Dey

Krishan Kumar's day starts early. At 5 a.m., the block printer from Kaladera in Rajasthan is up washing yards of cotton fabric to remove impurities. He then mixes *dabu*, a paste made from black clay, lime and acacia gum, to use in the ancient mud-resist printing technique that five generations of his family have been following.

As the sun moves across the sky, he sets up his printing table and proceeds to dip hand-carved wooden blocks featuring local flora and fauna into the paste to print patterns on the cloth. Hours later, after a quick stop for lunch, he dyes the fabric in large vats; the natural dyes used include the popular indigo with its deep blue colour.

It is a laborious process, but Kumar believes its cultural heritage and eco-friendly nature make it worth the effort. However, after days of back-breaking work, when he takes his fabric to Jaipur, over an hour away, many customers bypass his craft, which starts from ₹250 a metre, for bolts of machine-printed fabric that go as low as ₹80 per metre.

So, I understand Kumar's frustration when he tells me in Hindi: "If artisans have to uphold their identity in the market, we need GI [Geographical Indication]. It benefits them and the communities who do genuine work."

Kumar first came across the concept of GI and crafts IP (intellectual property) in 2021, when Swedish fashion brand H&M's collaboration with Indian designer Sabyasachi Mukherjee had featured digitised versions of GI-tagged Sanganeri block prints, with its delicate vines and paisley motifs.

News about the collab gave truth to his biggest worry: the impact of factory-made products on manpower-intensive crafts. "If machine-made prints mimic handblock prints, it affects artisans like us. Machines can do large-scale production and big brands also charge customers a lot more. Artisans can neither produce so much nor charge a lot," he states, explaining how an artisan can produce only 50 metres a day as compared to a machine that can produce 5,000.

The Prada effect in India

GI is defined as a tag attributed to goods produced within a specific geographical area and which possess characteristics or reputation tied to that region. It not only protects the authenticity of products, but also gives its producers economic advantages and (for artisans) a means to push back against counterfeiting and machine-made goods camouflaging as handmade crafts.

Kumar has spent the past few months as a participant in Creative Dignity's IP Group, a collaborative network of stakeholders from the Indian handmade sector, learning more about GI tags and how to wield it effectively in his practice. "I am trying to spread awareness among my community and I have also spoken to artisans in places like Bagru [another major block printing centre in Rajasthan that is GI tagged]."

The reality today is that, at the grassroots, very few understand the certification, its purpose and efficacy. Or that, as GI policies stand today, there are many gaps in it – the lack of centralised control for one, or enforcement mechanisms like that of corporate IP, or even international GI protection. A fact that was brought to light when Italian luxury label Prada presented GI-tagged Kolhapuri lookalikes at their runway show in June. Many lawsuits were filed, failing to understand that GI is a domestic law that protects a product's name and origin, but not its design or style. So, brands can mimic the look (like Prada did) without using the GI-tagged name and not face any penalties.

This is where State governments, entrepreneurs, and NGOs need to step up, not only by addressing the gaps, but also helping people learn how to make the best of it. Especially at a time when the Indian government is also pushing for GI; in January, Union Minister of Commerce & Industry Piyush Goyal announced a target of reaching 10,000 GI tags by 2030.

Despite controversies, Kumar believes that GI tags can still aid craftspeople like him. "We are now working to get a GI tag for *dabu*," he says. And he is not the only one seeking GI to protect his community's craft traditions. Over the last few years, GI tagging has turned into an athletic event with dozens of applications being filed for craft, foodstuff, and other items across States.

India passed The Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act in 1999. And since Darjeeling tea received the first GI tag in 2004-05, over 658 goods have received the tag and several more are in queue.

Scope of the law

Receiving a GI tag may yield news coverage, but controversy often turns on a much brighter spotlight. *Rasgulla*, for instance, became the subject of dispute between West Bengal and Odisha in 2017, with each State claiming the spongy sweet for its own. Both States received distinct GI tags (based on texture and flavour), though it did not stop debates about who really owns it. India and Pakistan have been in a tug of war over GI for basmati rice in a dispute that is playing out in international courts, even while Madhya Pradesh is petitioning to be recognised as the basmati-producing region in India.

Shwetasree Majumder, managing partner of Fidus Law Chambers in Noida, says that her pet peeve is with people in positions of influence who don't educate themselves on the scope of the law. "Everyone is content to opine on GI on the basis of their own perception," she says, noting that misinformation percolates down to the craftspeople and the law ends up being cited for cases where it doesn't apply. "The actual rights holders are not being educated," Majumder adds. What GI tags help stop is the sale of counterfeit goods or products not made in the specified region. What it does not guarantee is individual protection for artisans or additional benefits.

Why the tag matters

On the bright side, today an ecosystem has emerged across the country to facilitate GI tags. In Tamil Nadu, S. Vincent, member secretary of Tamil Nadu Council for Science and Technology (TANSCST), notes that the State is proactive. "We have instituted 40 IPR [intellectual property rights] cells, which are given the responsibility to identify popular products in their area. Each has to identify a minimum of two," he says.

The council is also involved in promotions and strategy following the registration. An added benefit: the involvement of academic researchers. Vincent gives the example of Kodaikanal *malai poondu*, a local variety of garlic. "[Since it got the tag], the Mother Teresa Women's University has developed a PCR-based detection kit to verify its genetic authenticity, thus preventing adulteration. Now, there is higher domestic demand, steadiness in pricing, and farmers have started exporting it and selling it online."

Better market visibility: Uttar Pradesh has the highest number of GIs, at 77, followed by Tamil Nadu, at 69. Across the country, "GI has enhanced market visibility and consumer trust", says K. Ganesh Moorthy, CEO of Madurai Agri Business Incubation Forum. For instance, in April, Tamil Nadu was accorded certification for six products in April, including the Panruti jackfruit and Ramanadu Chithiraikar rice. "[Since then] Panruti jackfruit has seen increasing attention in the domestic market. Farmers are now being supported to explore value-added products such as jackfruit chips, flour and powder."

CONTINUED ON
» PAGES 4-5

Anindita Ghose, editor of the anthology, *The Only City.*

A new anthology seeks to bring out the complexities of the city that is more than just a backdrop, via 18 different writers

BOMBAY AND ITS MAIN CHARACTER ENERGY

Radhika Santhanam
radhika.s@thehindu.co.in

Author and journalist Khushwant Singh once termed Bombay the "only city" in India. Calling the rest "oversized villages", he wrote, "It is true that Bombay has many more high-rise buildings than any other Indian city: when you approach it by the sea it looks like a miniature New York. It has other things to justify its city status: it is congested, it has traffic jams at all hours of the day, it is highly polluted and many parts of it stink."

Bombay or Mumbai still holds that status for other reasons as well. It is perhaps the only city in India where you can see Gothic spires and glass skyscrapers in the blink of an eye. It is the only city that never sleeps, yet harbours millions of dreams. Bombay is evidently a banker's treasure trove; it is equally a writer's muse.

In *The Only City: Bombay in Eighteen Stories*, various writers bring out the contradictions of this bustling megapolis. "What we have here, in these pages," writes Anindita Ghose, in her editor's note, "is a collection of Bombay moments."

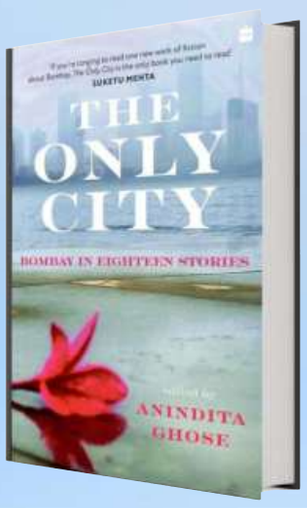
Intimacy in crowded spaces

These moments are clear to a Mumbaikar almost instantly. In Amrita Mahale's story 'Aai-Tai', Sayli, who works in AI annotation, bumps into her boss, Ananya, on the street where she lives. Ananya says she is surprised that she has never seen Sayli before, despite being her neighbour. But Sayli knows better: in a sprawling, unequal city, the poor struggle for visibility.

In Diksha Basu's 'Bollywood, Baby', an aspiring actor wears a dress that's worth almost half her rent. While her father remains hopeful that she will return home to a "real job" some day, she does all she can to make a mark in the glamour world.

In Ghose's excellent 'Normal Neighbours', a happy couple, Mahesh and Aparna, moves into a glitzy apartment. Aparna slips into her new life easily: sipping vegetable juice, going for laps in the pool, and raising glasses of wine at parties. But she becomes nervous and snappy when she realises that not just crushed linen clothes, but partner swapping too is a fad for the super rich.

Sometimes, entire stories are Bombay moments. Overcrowded trains spell discomfort or even death for some, but in Prathyush Parasuraman's gripping 'Two Bi Two', they provide occasion for sexual gratification. This is a city where small shanties offer little to no room, so intimacy spills into the train and becomes a public act; a part of the literal Bombay journey. There is voyeurism as well – bored or curious men look on, knowingly but silently, at the two men's bodies in rhythm until they are spat out of the train. In 'The Hon. Secy', Kersi Khambatta turns everyday apartment fights into a wildly entertaining tale full of humour and over-the-top drama.



The Only City: Bombay in Eighteen Stories
Ed. Anindita Ghose
Fourth Estate India
₹699

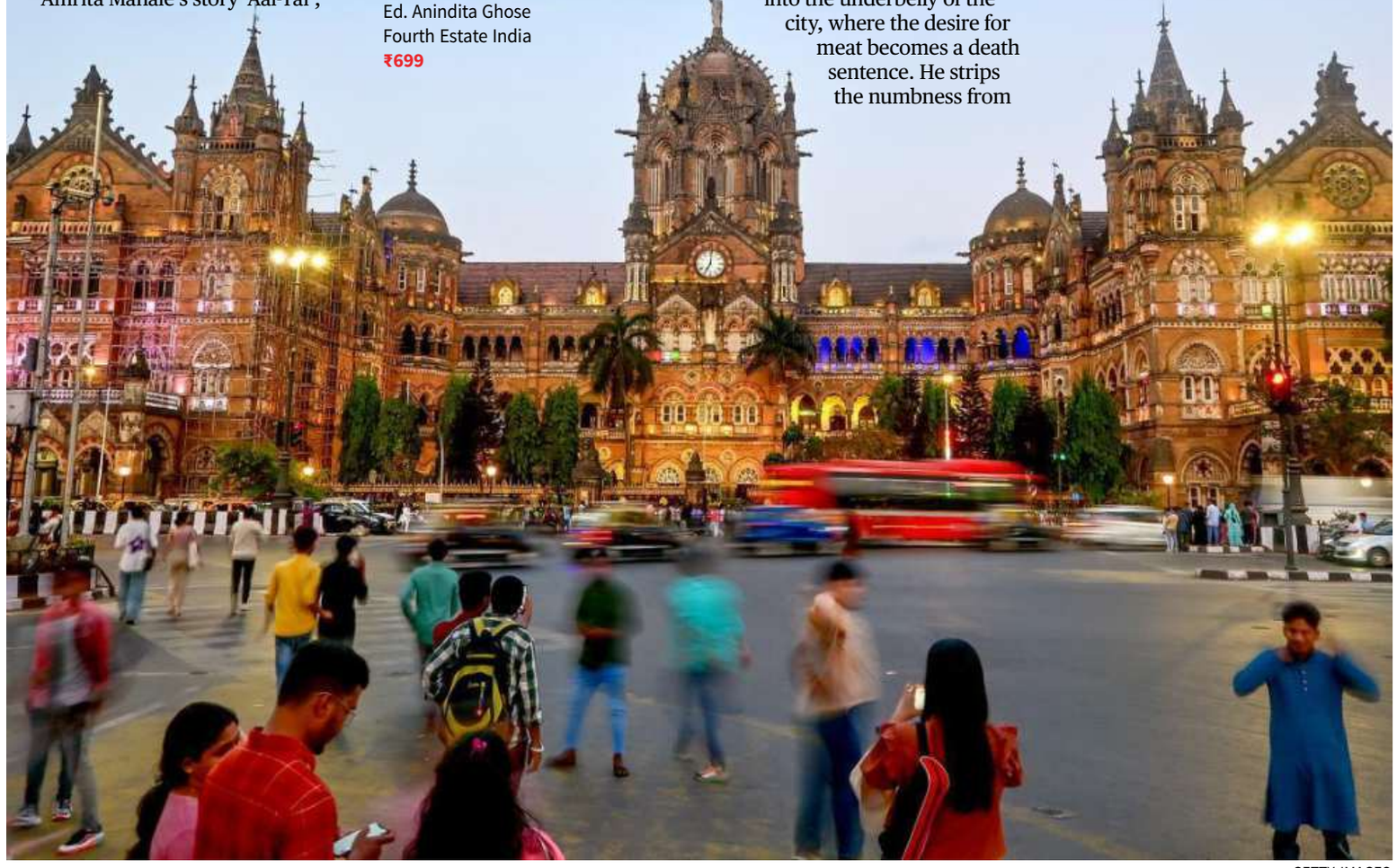
The city as witness

Bombay can be too romanticised as a city of upward mobility and hope. But as Yogesh Maitreya writes, "Mumbai is [also] the graveyard of many, many dreams – dreams that dare to create a fusion of love and justice." Jeet Thayil's 'Your Meat in My Hands' plunges the reader into the underbelly of the city, where the desire for meat becomes a death sentence. He strips the numbness from routine newspaper headlines, exposing the raw, brutal horror behind them with visceral clarity. This is a Bombay that makes you shudder and squirm.

In his debut short story, 'Where The Lights Never Go Out', Jairaj Singh also steps into ruthless dark places. While Thayil's characters command that world, Singh's characters go in gingerly, with plenty of curiosity, a little hunger, and some fear.

The collection spans Mumbai – from the southernmost tip of the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, to Malabar Hills, Marine Drive, Dadar, Mulund, Sion, all the way to Andheri East. They revolve around dreamers, hustlers, schemers, and lovers – each bringing out a slice of life in an ever-changing city. Amid pages brimming with restlessness, Chirodeep Chaudhuri's photographs capture moments of stillness and quiet.

As with any ambitious collection that seeks to bring out the complexities of a city through very different voices – from Shanta Gokhale and Ranjit Hoskote to Prayaag Akbar and Raghu Karnad – only some stories are truly memorable. But even where the writing doesn't shine, Bombay or Mumbai does – as the beating heart of the narrative.



GETTY IMAGES

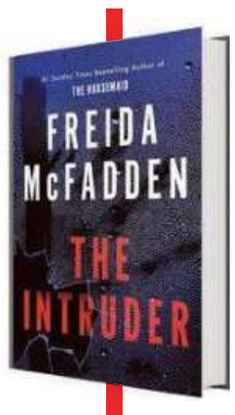
ONE FOR THE ROAD

Winter is coming

It's time to go big and bold, with domestic thrillers, historical pageturners and a highland romance

Swati Daftuar

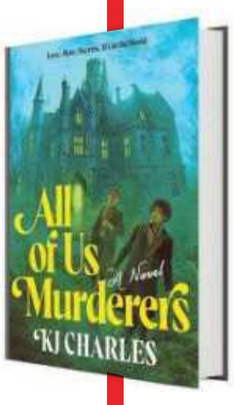
The season's turning, and the books this month match the mood. These are stories made for afternoon reading; for soft throws and half-drawn curtains. You'll find everything from domestic dread and seasonal libraries to hurricanes. Consider this your pre-winter reading starter pack.



***The Intruder* | Freida McFadden**

McFadden knows how to hook her reader. One chapter turns into four before you've noticed, and suddenly it's midnight. This story — about a young woman riding out a violent storm in a remote cabin before she is joined by a stranger, a runaway with a past — is big, bold, and yes, sometimes over the top, but you're not here for subtle. You're here for heart-pounding fun. The author is also a practising physician, which gives her psychological turns that cool, clinical snap.

(Penguin; ₹550)



***All of Us Murderers* | K.J. Charles**

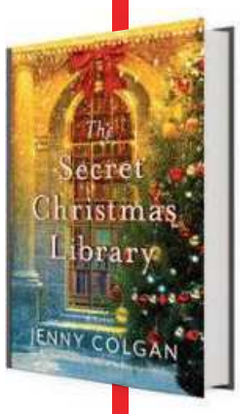
Locked gates, Dartmoor mist, an inheritance "game" and a weekend that curdles into bodies and betrayals; this one's all simmering tension and biting wit, with dialogue that zings and a dark heart that still manages to feel oddly tender. Charles makes murders feel like high-stakes theatre, and you can't look away. It helps that before writing novels, she spent years as an editor, which shows in the structural neatness of her reveals.

(Poisoned Pen Press; ₹922 [ebook])

***Love and Crime in the Time of Plague* | Anuradha Kumar**

Reading this novel feels like stepping into Bombay at the turn of another century — humid, bustling, and suddenly under siege. It is 1896 and disease slips ashore with the cargo. As the administration fights to contain the plague, anonymous threats target anyone pushing hard drugs or hygiene. In this sequel to the first 'Bombay Mystery', Kumar folds the panic of plague into a city thrumming with secrets, rumours, and reform.

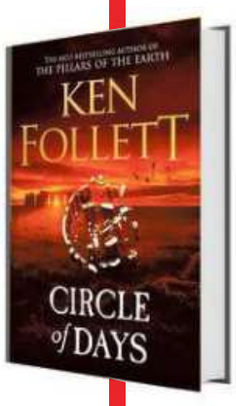
(Speaking Tiger; 499)



***The Secret Christmas Library* | Jenny Colgan**

No one does bookish and cosy quite like Colgan. There's snow, secrets, a library full of odd treasures, and just the right blend of whimsy and warmth. It's festive without being fluffy, and yes, there's romance. Colgan once wrote a Doctor Who novel, which is why a playful genre wink often peeks through her seasonal tales.

(William Morrow; ₹520 [ebook])



***Circle of Days* | Ken Follett**

Follett recreates vast, expansive worlds with bones of history and beating human hearts. In Neolithic Britain, a drought pits herders, farmers, and woodlanders against each other as a flint-miner and a priestess try to raise a stone circle. Follett builds on modern archaeological thinking to give the construction scenes behind the Stonehenge a grounded, believable edge. Every rope and pulley feels like it could have actually happened.

(Quercus; ₹799)

(A new column on popular fiction for the month.)

The writer is an independent journalist, editor, and literary curator.

A spin on colonisation

Alan Gemmell examines anxieties about imperial decline in his debut novel where Britain is India's newest State

Stanley Carvalho

When India became independent in 1947, few would have imagined it would surpass Britain 75 years later, to become the fifth largest economy in the world in 2022.

Is it possible then that five years later, Britain becomes a colony of India? The coloniser now colonised?

British Member of Parliament and former head of the British Council in India Alan Gemmell boldly explores exactly that in his debut novel *30th State*. Engaging, racy and entertaining in parts, the political thriller is inspired by Gemmell's six-year stay in India.

It is 2027, and with the loss of Scotland, Britain is neither "United" nor "Great", and unable to meet its debt obligations, it is hurtling towards bankruptcy. The opposition is up in arms, screaming for prime minister Mark Richardson's resignation and fresh elections. There's a global run on the Sterling Pound. Britain's allies are busy fighting populists in their own countries.

With no options left, Mark speaks to India's prime minister Asha Sachdev, seeking renegotiation of loans. The latter declines and drops a bombshell.

"I have spoken to the King. England will come under the temporary protection of India. Tomorrow, the King will sign this instrument of accession and you will resign."

30th State
Alan Gemmell
Bloomsbury India
₹499

The King will be the head of India's 30th State – Britain.

Reversing history

For the first time in a thousand years, England is under foreign occupation.

Bradford-born Karan Puri, leader of the Conservative Party, is appointed First Minister, and Manish Palkhivala takes over as Governor-General of Britain. Arun Deshmukh, a young Maharashtrian politician, is sent as High Commissioner to repatriate the riches of the new empire.

The new regime goes about implementing its agenda, orchestrated by Karan's father-in-law, a wealthy businessman and close friend of India's prime minister.

Train-operating companies are transferred to Bharat Rail, water companies to Pani Bharat, BBC becomes Bharti Broadcasting Corporation and the new currency is the digital Sterling Rupee.

A sense of disquiet sweeps across Britain; protests and riots erupt with shouts and banners of 'India Quit'.

The novel ends with a delicious plot twist when First Minister Karan and his wife fly to Scotland where they are met by the Queen in her castle.

While reverse colonisation forms the narrative arc of the novel, Gemmell examines anxieties about imperial decline, freedom, power, democracy, friends and love, all set against a brilliantly reversed historical backdrop.

The reviewer is a Bengaluru-based independent journalist.

Harinder Baweja started her career in the 1980s and has reported across the tenures of multiple Prime Ministers, from Indira Gandhi to Narendra Modi. (ISHAAN CHAWLA)

INTERVIEW

WHEN JOURNALISM WAS FEARLESS

Harinder Baweja takes readers through her four-decade journey reporting on seismic events that shaped India

Manoj Mitta

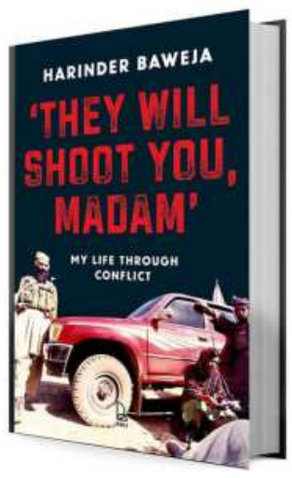
Harinder Baweja began her journalistic career in the 1980s and has worked through several Prime Ministers from Indira Gandhi to Narendra Modi. In her four-decade stint, she has reported on some of the cataclysmic events that have shaped India as a nation. In an interview about her memoir, *'They Will Shoot You, Madam': My Life Through Conflict* (Roli Books), Baweja explains why mixing religion and politics makes for a heady cocktail but adds dangerous fuel to conflicts. An edited excerpt:

Question: *While admitting at your book event that Indira Gandhi had paid with her life for the "mistake" of Operation Blue Star, P. Chidambaram has sidestepped Rajiv Gandhi's accountability for the 1984 Delhi carnage.*
Answer: It is well known that Indira Gandhi was shot dead by her bodyguards because she signed off on a costly mission to send the Army and its tanks into the most revered Sikh shrine. Chidambaram used the word 'riot' while referring to the 1984 carnage and that alone agitated the audience at the event. The burning of Sikhs in 1984 remains a wound that has not healed. The lack of justice fuels that fire and at the same event, I said that Rajiv Gandhi's son Rahul is still trying to address that wound by repeatedly going to the Golden Temple as a *kar sewak*, a community worker. The audience was quick to point to Rajiv Gandhi's words – when a big tree falls, the earth shakes. Embers of conflict are easy to stoke and his comment justifying the carnage remains a part of the Sikh community's collective conscience.

Q: *In the wake of the Babri Masjid demolition, your investigation disproved L.K. Advani's claim that temples had been damaged across Kashmir. But in the run-up to the 2024 consecration of the Ayodhya temple, there were, as you say, broadcast vans emblazoned with* "Ram aayenge". *What does such a difference bode for journalists?*
A: The surrender of several media houses to the pressure from the government keeps so many journalists from staying true to their essential remit which is to hold the powerful to account. Today, when we try to call out the diabolical lie that was propagated by the BJP after the demolition of the Babri Masjid, we are called 'anti-nationals' and asked to go to Pakistan. Seriously speaking, I would love to go back to Pakistan as a journalist if I were given a visa.

Q: *What is your view on the security lapses concerning the Pahalgam episode?*
A: The Pahalgam attack punctured the Centre's 'Naya Kashmir' narrative. Unfortunately, instead of analysing the glaring intelligence and security failures at Pahalgam, several TV studios asked for Chief Minister Omar Abdullah's head. He is not even in charge of security, a domain that rests with J&K's lieutenant governor. Instead of seeking accountability from the Centre, the 'godi media' was happy conquering Lahore one day and Karachi the next.

Q: *As a woman journalist, how did you cope with the avowed misogyny of Taliban?*
A: I am a journalist and don't like being referred to as either a 'Sikh journalist' or a 'woman journalist'. I have never sought concessions because I happen to be a woman but my tryst with the Taliban helped me understand their edicts only because I was a woman. It remains the most claustrophobic assignment of my over four-decade career, but my gender gave me crucial insights into how Afghanistan's women are being erased and how their freedoms are being snatched. The Taliban foreign minister tried to bring the same medieval thought process to Indian soil [on October 10] but a fierce pushback saw him host a second press conference. Unfortunately, the women of his country continue to live cloistered lives and Afghanistan will soon be a country without teachers, nurses and doctors. Ironically, we are willing to lay out the red carpet for the Taliban militia but are not willing to speak to the Kashmiris who condemned terrorism after the Pahalgam attack.



Q: *You visited the headquarters of Lashkar-e-Taiba near Lahore within a fortnight of 26/11. You could not have done anything of the sort post Pahalgam. What are the implications of this drastic change for journalists?*
A: There was a time when journalism itself was fearless. The phrase 'godi media' makes a lot of us flinch. I remain optimistic because there are discerning consumers of news who know where to get their information from. The truth has a way of emerging despite the attempts to stifle it.

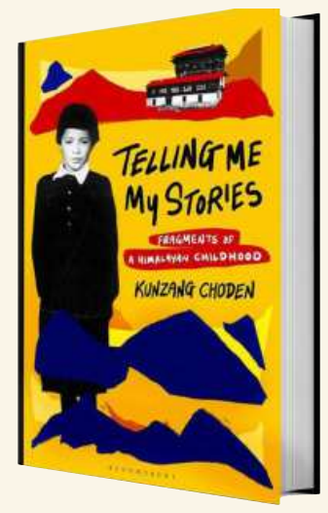
Q: *Having tracked the extensive abuse of religion for decades, what is your big takeaway?*
A: Mixing religion and politics makes for a heady cocktail but adds dangerous fuel to conflicts. Conflicts are murky enough; adding electoral strategies to the fold makes conflict murkier. Lastly, conflict should not be used as a strategy to strengthen vote banks. It is sad that windows of opportunity are frittered away and it was personally heartbreaking for me to hear Himanshi Narwal say after losing her husband in Pahalgam what political parties and governments need to have said: don't demonise Kashmiris and Muslims. The faultlines will only fester till that message is understood for its full import.

The interviewer is the author of Caste Pride: Battles for Equality in Hindu India.

IN CONVERSATION

Stories lifted 'my darkest days'

Bhutanese author Kunzang Choden on her memoir, and the role of Bhutan's monarchy in its modernisation



Suhasini Haidar
suhasini.h@thehindu.co.in

Don't call me Ashi (Princess)," Kunzang Choden admonishes this reporter. The 73-year-old silver-haired writer may not be comfortable with titles by birth, but in her lifetime, she has earned the title of the Royal Matriarch of Bhutanese writing. In 2005, her book *Circle of Karma* was the first such novel in English written by a Bhutanese author. Since then, she has built a vast network and helped publish other Bhutanese writers. Choden, who was educated in India, has published a memoir, *Telling Me My Stories* (Bloomsbury India), recounting her unusual childhood and family. In an interview, on the sidelines of Bhutan Echoes, Drukyul's annual Literature and Arts Festival in Thimphu, she spoke about the importance of early memories, and the role of the monarchy in Bhutan's modernisation process. Edited excerpts:

Question: *Your memoir looks back at your early years, going to school, and ends just before college. Why is that? Is there a sequel in the works?*
Answer: Well, I don't know if there will be a sequel. I haven't thought about it, but I write about childhood memories because they are stronger. They are the memories of who I was, where I came from, who my parents were, what our history was; they are the memories I carried with me throughout my life, and I think they have shaped me to be what I am today.

These are the stories I lived with in my darkest days, when I was completely alienated after being sent to a convent in India where I spoke no English, Hindi or Nepali, and couldn't understand anybody. I think they were somehow my tool for survival; these memories helped me to never lose sight of who I was and where I came from.

Q: *You were part of a generation that was actively pushed by the government to go and study in India. Why did the King think this was necessary?*
A: I think it was a difficult decision, but visionary. Bhutan's third King, Jigme Dorji Wangchuck, who reigned from 1952-1972, assisted by his Prime Minister Dasho Jigme Palden Dorji (Bhutan's First PM, 1952-1964) felt that monastic education was not egalitarian. It didn't prepare us for a modern Bhutan. A monastic education was important to preserve our culture, religion, things like that, but it was inaccessible to the rest of the population. More than 90% of the population were illiterate, and we relied completely on the monasteries and the clergy to tell us everything, to write for us, to think fast, literally, and we were just being told what we had to do, what the right things were, what our history was. For these two men to break this tradition and say, now we need to modernise our country, was wise. It was not just for boys, but open to all, anyone who was willing to go. At the time we left Bhutan to go to schools in India, the first schools were being built. The idea was that the first one or two groups of kids would go to India, and in the meantime, schools would be built in Bhutan. I think that was a vision that was really farsighted.

Q: *In your book, one of the strongest characters is your mother. Yet, she was just 32 when she died, after having five children and what seemed like a lonely marriage without much agency in her life...*

Kunzang Choden has earned the title of the Royal Matriarch of Bhutanese writing.

A: I write about her absences and the silences. My mother was a very silent person. She only talked when it was necessary. She came into the marriage very reluctantly. She was more inclined to practising Buddhism. She was a quiet person who made her presence felt just by doing. And when there were times she reached out to me to talk, I didn't understand. So she had a very lonely life, which I write about.

Q: *As you prepared to leave, the village came around to stop your father from sending your brother and you to India.*
A: Yes, I think they were just afraid of change. These were people who had never even left Bumthang valley, and they didn't want to see change. They felt that if my father, who was related to the royal family, and was the lord of the village, sent his children, they too would be expected to follow suit. My parents had travelled to India and Tibet and had seen a bit of the world; they had to convince them that their children would be safe and that India would not "eat them up".

Five views from India

The shortlist of the NIF Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay Book Prize 2025 celebrates research and perspective

Team Magazine

An intellectual history of Hindutva ideologue V.D. Savarkar, essays from fieldwork among India's marginalised, a book on India's challenging relations with Myanmar and Bangladesh, an account of how colonialism, Christian missionaries and indigenous reform movements shaped modern Hindu identity, and the life and work of engineer-statesman M. Visvesvaraya have made it to the shortlist of the NIF Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay Book Prize 2025.

The review in *The Hindu* called Janaki Bakhle's *Savarkar and the Making of Hindutva* (Princeton University Press/PRH) one of the most "detailed and dispassionate analysis of the ideals of Savarkar." She drew on Savarkar's writings in Marathi and English for her examination of Savarkar's ideas, which have become the "blueprint for exclusionary Hindu nationalism."

Bela Bhatia gathers her three decades of work among Dalits, Adivasis, women and other communities in *India's Forgotten Country: A View from the Margins (Penguin).*

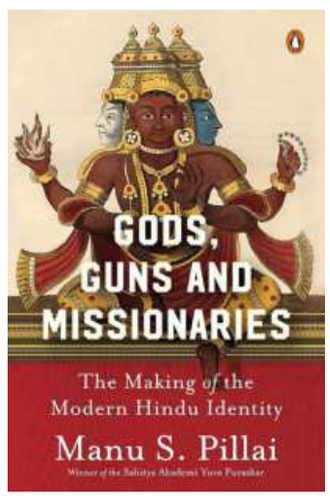
Avinash Paliwal looks at India's relations with India's eastern neighbours in *India's Near East: A New History* (Penguin). The review in *The Hindu* said Paliwal has carefully woven "the histories of India's northeast with Bangladesh and Myanmar with the regular appearance of China. Narco-crime, long-standing insurgencies, political ambitions and interpersonal rivalry mix with religious nationalisms of different hues."

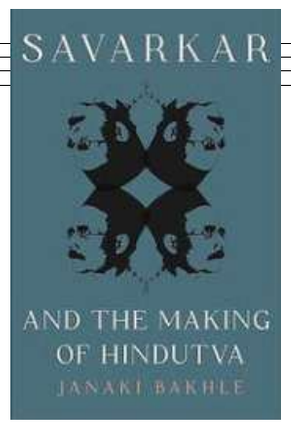
Talking about *Gods, Guns and Missionaries: The Making of the Modern Hindu Identity (Penguin),* historian Manu S. Pillai says the interplay of colonialism, Christian missionary activity and home-grown reform movements "impacted the way we define Hinduism and the Hindu identity today, while also shaping Indian Christianity."

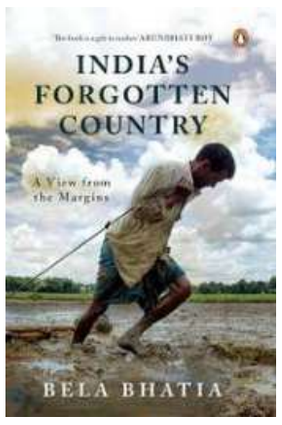
Aparajith Ramnath's *Engineering a Nation: The Life and Career of M. Visvesvaraya* (Penguin) profiles one of post-Independence India's most well-known engineer-statesman. Mokshagundam Visvesvaraya (1861-1962) "pushed strongly for industrial modernity in a colonial era that could not conceive of the idea of Indian self-reliance."

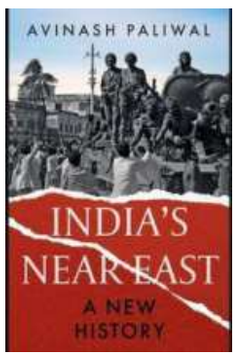
Rahul Matthan, member of the governing board of NIF, said for the shortlist of five from a longlist of 10 books, the jury not only looked at the quality of research and originality of perspective but also how each title "deepens our understanding of India's recent past and present."

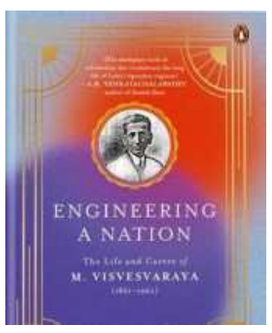
The winner will be announced on December 6.











An artisan making lac bangles in Hyderabad. (SIVAKUMAR P.V.)

CONTINUED FROM
» PAGE 1

Gains for farmers and artisans:
Last year, a study conducted by Symbiosis School of Economics, with the support of NABARD (National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development), revealed that GI registration has led to significant gains for artisans. "In some cases, monthly incomes rose by 20%-75%, sales by up to 70%-75%, and product prices by 50%-70%," says B.R. Premi, chief general manager of Mumbai-based NABARD. "For example, artisans of Banaras *gulabi meenakari* [known for its delicate pink enamel work on silver] reported a 20% rise in monthly incomes and nearly 50% higher product prices after GI registration. The tag has also enhanced market access, with many products finding space in international markets."

Effective implementation
What many do not realise, however, is that submitting a GI application for review is just the first step. Once the tag is granted, local initiatives have to ensure its implementation. "We need a certification body in that geographic area to confirm an atelier or product has followed the process listed in the GI application [how it is created, made, or grown]," explains Ritu Sethi, founder-trustee of Delhi's Crafts Revival Trust, who has been on expert committees that grant GI certificates. And such initiatives, she says, are a rarity even today.

Pashmina is an example of effective implementation. The Kashmiri craft was one of the earliest to receive a GI tag in 2005. TAHAFUZ, an apex body of artisans from Kashmir's GI-tagged crafts, took the onus of promoting infrastructural facilities for testing and ensuring that artisans were duly vetted and certified. Crafts and design consultant Renuka Savasere, who was part of the Craft Development Institute, shares that since then the number of GI-authorised artisans has been rising. "Artisans are incentivised to make Pashmina because there's an economic benefit attached," she says.

Branding and marketing are key
GI registration is definitely not the end of the journey. The real impact begins with strong post-registration support – both locally and internationally. For example, inside the upscale Novotel Hotel in Hyderabad, Sunday brunch comes with a live demonstration – lac artisans making their GI-tagged bangles. For the past several months, they have been taking diners through the process of handcrafting each piece – spreading awareness. "For the GI tag to have any market impact it has to be marketed as such," says Subhajit Saha, founder of Resolute4IP, the IP facilitation service that is helping many craft and agriculture communities gain the coveted GI tag. "There has to be marketing, branding. Only then will the product become more desirable."

Such knowledge is sorely lacking, hobbling artisans and farmers who don't know how to take advantage of GI. "Limited awareness among producers, high costs of raw materials, and inadequate access to credit hinder the full potential of GI. Insufficient training in business and digital marketing also restricts artisans from capitalising on new opportunities," agrees Premi of NABARD. He adds, however, that they have recognised the problem and have now started focusing on crucial post-GI activities such as extending marketing support, building consumer awareness, and conducting training programmes for producers and artisans.

With the Prada incident highlighting the vulnerability of India's traditional crafts to global appropriation, he states that the next step should be for stronger international enforcement and better branding. "With the right mix of legal safeguards, promotion, and international partnerships, GI products can become powerful tools for both heritage preservation and global market success," he concludes.

The writer and editor is based in Delhi.

INSIDE INDIA'S RACE FOR THE GI TAG

We want to build a legal cell that can advise artisans on what kind of contracts to sign, and what IP sharing means. We also want to advocate for better GI policies and address gaps that hinder artisans

AANCHAL SODHANI
Crafts practitioner who is part of Creative Dignity, an initiative that explores legal and intellectual property issues faced by artisans

TAMIL NADU

The State has 69 GI tags. The number went up in April when six products were accorded certification. And most have proved why certification matters. Kovilpatti *kadalai mittai* (peanut candy), for instance, increased sales from ₹75 lakh in 2018-19 (before GI) to ₹1.1 crore in 2020-21 (after GI), and now it has reached ₹2.05 crore in 2024-25 with branding support.

Latest GI tag: Panruti cashew and jackfruit, Puliyankudi acid lime, Virudhunagar *samba vathal*, Chettikulam small onion, and Ramanadu *chithiraikar* rice in April 2025

Success story: "GI has enhanced market visibility and consumer trust. For example, Cumbum *paneer* grapes and Kanyakumari *matti* banana have gained recognition through the GI Mahotsav, drawing consumer interest," says K. Ganesh Moorthy, executive director and CEO of Madurai Agri Business Incubation Forum. "Madurai *malli* [jasmine] has also gained strong export demand after its GI recognition, and is projected to cross ₹35 crore in 2024-25, with major shipments going to the Middle East, Singapore, and Malaysia."

STATE OF THE TAG

Most States have multiple GI-tagged products. But it's a mixed bag when it comes to awareness, marketing, and increased profits.

TELANGANA

During the big Ambani family wedding, news spread about a ₹2 crore order for customised Tarakasi silver filigree work, the 400-year-old GI-tagged craft from Karimnagar, as a part of the return gift. You can pick up a Pochampally Ikat sari for upwards of ₹6,000 at a store that brands and sells handloom saris. But are people ready to pay for the GI tag's 'exclusivity promise'? That is the big question as Telangana snags 27 GI-tagged products, with a dozen more applications in the pipeline.

Latest GI tag: Warangal Chapata Chilli in March 2025

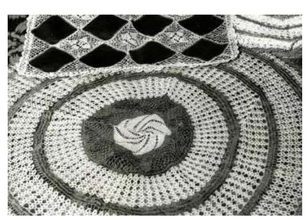
A leaf from the Japanese: "We are following the Japanese model of 'one village one product', and using it as 'one district one product'," says Sreeha Reddy, Director for Toys Industry, GI, Government of Telangana. "We want to create the ecosystem for identifying, fostering and marketing the GI products of the state. Recently we banned all non-GI products from Shilparamam, a crafts village." Reddy feels the next wave of GI products will come from the food and agriculture sector.

ANDHRA PRADESH

The State has around 17 GI tags — including Banaganapalle mango, Etikoppaka toys, Pedana *kalamkari* — but IP professional Subhajit Saha believes the State has over 70 products that have the potential for certification. However, he believes interest and knowledge needs to be built. "50% of artisans do not know what the certification means for them," he says. "Also, while the tag increases an artisan's income, it is not enough for a product to sell. Price, quality, and appearance are equally important. One has to know how to package it."

Latest GI tag: Narasapur crochet lace craft in 2024

Upcoming: The government is helping with design interventions to increase the market value of GI-tagged products. "In the case of Kondapalli toys, we are training artisans to make key chains, jewellery and everyday products that can replace plastic," says Lajwanti Naidu, assistant director (capacity building), A.P. Tourism Authority. "We are also training artisans in digital marketing and connecting them with companies." To improve visibility, they are also planning an experience centre to help tourists visiting GI-tagged villages understand the history of the craft or product.



ASSAM

Dhol, *jaapi* (decorative headgear), *boka chaul* (a type of rice), and *muga* silk are among the State's 41 GI-tagged products. But Khagen Haloi, a farmer from the Nalbari district, says he has no idea what GI tags are. He has a hunch, however, that it is the reason why prices for his aromatic *joha* rice have gone up from ₹70-₹80 per kg a year ago to ₹140-₹150 per kg this year. Ironically, the steep hike means his business is in trouble. "I have fewer customers for my rice in Guwahati, which is why I now sell my farm-grown vegetables more," he says.

Latest GI tag: Axomiya Gohona, a centuries-old jewellery making craft, in April 2025

Upcoming: Assam's Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) is working towards GI tags of cultural artefacts belonging to all 26 communities of the region. They have also announced plans to create 'GI Villages' — where artisans and farmers will be supported with training, infrastructure and direct market linkages to create a self-sustaining ecosystem.

KERALA

Before the famous Marayur jaggery got its GI tag in 2019, its makers had to sell it for just ₹40 per kg to wholesale dealers, who dictated the price. "Now, people come from far and wide to buy it directly from us," says P.N. Vijayan, a sugarcane farmer and producer of the jaggery. "This Onam, I sold it for as much as ₹110 a kg." Till date, Kerala has 36 GI tagged products.

Latest GI tag: Kannadippaya (a tribal handicraft from Idukki with a reflective weave) in April 2024

Pro move: The State government has a dedicated website, gikerala.in, that offers access to all GI-tagged products from the State. They also provide legal support to protect producers from counterfeit goods, while extending working capital assistance to promote value-added products. In Idukki, the Kerala Forest Research Institute has launched a comprehensive revival mission to breathe new life into Kannadippaya weaving. The initiative spans the entire value chain — from cultivating bamboo to sourcing the harvested material, and training a new generation of weavers.

UTTAR PRADESH

Prem Chandra, a Bhadohi carpet artisan, is not too clear about GI tags, but he admits that "in the last 10 years his business has expanded". In fact, sales of the carpets, which bagged the GI tag in 2010, has grown 10 times, especially exports. Today, even with the highest number of GI tags, the State isn't sitting on its laurels. A government spokesperson shared that authorities are working on a comprehensive action plan to secure GI tags for 75 more products in 2025-26.

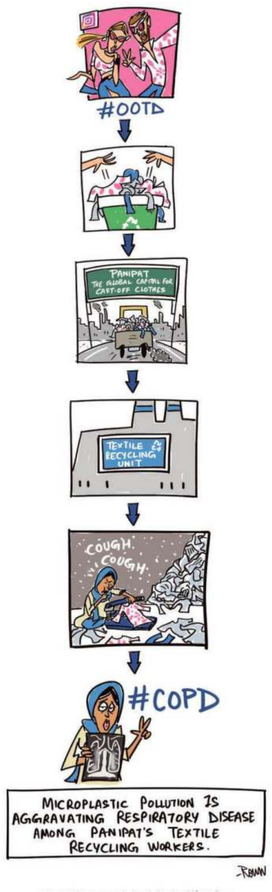
Latest GI tag: Banarasi *shehnai* and Banaras Bharwan Mirch in April 2025

Upcoming: To raise awareness and expand the base of GI products, the MSME department is onboarding entrepreneurs — certified to produce and market authentic goods — as authorised users. This aims to increase market recognition and protect against imitation.

With inputs from **Sangeetha Kandavel, Serish Nanisetti, Sravani Nellore, Rahul Karmakar, Mini Muringatheri, and Mayank Kumar**.

GREEN HUMOUR

Rohan Chakravarty


#OOTD
PANIPAT BE GLOBAL CAPITAL FOR CAST-OFF CLOTHES
TEXTILE RECYCLING UNIT
COUGH. COUGH.
#COPD
MICROPLASTIC POLLUTION IS AGGRAVATING RESPIRATORY DISEASE AMONG PANIPAT'S TEXTILE RECYCLING WORKERS.

Nishat Fatima

A woman in trousers is not often a mainstream celebrity style identity. From the time I decided in my early 20s that I would wear a lot of pants – for reasons ranging from rebellious (Western clothing!) to pragmatic (less waxing) – there have only been a small pool of heroes to choose from. Katharine Hepburn, Audrey Hepburn, and Diane Keaton became my holy trinity.

While the Hepburns had their signature looks – Katharine championed wide-legged pants with button-down Oxford shirts and Audrey chose cigarette/capri pants with ballet flats – Keaton wore her pants every which way. Cropped, wide-legged, boot cut, skinny, straight, and baggy.

I discovered Keaton the last, sometime in mid-2010s, when her *Annie Hall* (1977) look became the inspiration for a fashion season. While I only remember snippets from the film, her look – suit vests, men's shoes, baggy pleated pants, knotted ties, and floppy hats – remains fresh.

As has been endlessly chronicled since, it was a look that was very much Keaton's own and it has been hailed as doing as much for pants in her time as Marlene Dietrich and Katharine Hepburn before her. This despite the fact that it had been around a decade since Yves Saint Laurent had introduced the tuxedo and pantsuit for women, and over half a century since Coco Chanel and Jean Patou had introduced pants for women to free them from restrictive clothing.

Damned if you do, damned if you don't
Women in tailored menswear have long been a socially and politically loaded image. Trousers symbolised male power and women who wore them were accused of being unfeminine. The aura of movie star glamour went some way in protecting them, but even that didn't fully shield Katharine Hepburn, Greta Garbo, and Marlene Dietrich from the labels.

Trousers were also considered lesbian coded, while wearing full suits an assault on male identity and simultaneously a feminist issue of giving into male dominance. (This doesn't apply to jeans or track pants, which are considered more unisex.) Damned if you do, damned if you don't. The easiest option, and one that is still followed, was to only wear them some of the time, to let yourself be seen often enough in 'feminine' attire to offset the masculine.

But Keaton made her identity all about the menswear, right down to the shoes. She often took to the red carpet clad in tuxedos, three-piece suits, and spats. In the process, she created an alternative glamour, a version of modest fashion, and used every trope of what was unattractive in women and flipped it on its head. Besides her eclectically layered menswear, the oversized jackets, dangly neckties, layers of sweaters and vests, and cowboy boots, she also wore glasses and bowler hats.

TRIBUTE | 1946-2025

DIANE KEATON SHE WORE HER PANTS, SO I COULD TOO

On the *Annie Hall* actor's unapologetic style and the quiet power of refusing to fit in

Bespoke, she spoke (Clockwise from left) Diane Keaton at the 76th Academy Awards in Hollywood; actor Audrey Hepburn; Keaton with actor-director Woody Allen in the film *Annie Hall* (1977); and actor Katharine Hepburn. (GETTY IMAGES)

An anti-fit in a straitjacket world
The look she created was very much her own, one that could range from androgynous to asexualised to feminine. Of course, the fact that there was a history of skin cancer in her family makes her choices not only sartorial but also practical. She was herself diagnosed twice: with basal cell carcinoma at age 21 and squamous cell cancer decades later.

While Annie Hall's androgynous style might have catapulted Keaton to fashion fame, it was not one that she stuck to all her life. You only need to look at her outfit to the Oscars of 1978, when she won Best Actress for *Annie Hall*, to see how soon she changed it up. She wore a swingy, voluminous mid-calf skirt over straight pants topped with a double-breasted Armani blazer – a kind of layering that has never reached the mainstream and would leave current red-carpet watchers aghast.

In a video on her Instagram, she was seen talking about how interested she was in fashion. What's left unsaid was her willingness to take risks and try something new.

Over the years, Keaton's showed off her grey hair, eschewed cosmetic surgery, and never had a stylist. She played with volume often, especially when wearing skirts or dresses, and she did wear them, with as much pizzazz as she did trousers. She enjoyed a good anti-fit and often layered it with long coats. She mixed plaids and pearls, boots and blazers, cravats and big belts.

Freedom to have a finger in every pie
The introduction of pants was one way for Chanel to champion comfort and freedom; Katharine Hepburn famously skateboarded in hers, and Diane Keaton, perhaps, used that freedom to pursue anything that interested her. Besides being a Hollywood star, she wrote three memoirs, *Then Again* (2011), *Let's Just Say it Wasn't Pretty* (2014), and *Brother & Sister: A Memoir* (2020), and published numerous photography books, hers, others, and of found photographs. She pursued photography, shot a series of hotel interiors for *Rolling Stone* magazine, which then became the book *Reservations*, published by Knopf in 1980. The geometry of the black-and-white photographs inside finds an echo in her often monochrome clothing, checks and stripes.

Keaton also did up houses, preserved two Frank Lloyd Wright buildings and published books on interiors: *The House that Pinterest Built* (2017) and *California Romantica* (2007). She adopted two children in her 50s, released a music single, and became an Instagram star.

Over the years, I only saw Keaton on Pinterest and sometimes on red carpets, and was always struck by her genuine interest in fashion and putting clothes together. You can see when someone is having fun; not caring about always getting it right. That was Keaton's biggest gift to me and her many fans, to enjoy the process of dressing up, to experiment, and not care if it always lands.

In her book, *Fashion First* (2024), she says, "I wanted my clothes to scream, Hey! Look! Look over here!" But, perhaps, this was the only thing she was unsuccessful at – yes, people looked at her and admired her clothes and style, but only because they were a part of her, not because they were clothes that screamed for attention. She wore them, they did not wear her.

The writer is a fashion commentator and author.

GETTY IMAGES/ ISTOCK

ALLEGEDLY

If you really must protest

...why not do it by paying more tax, or by donating your money to the government?

As a nationalist who loves his country like crazy, I ponder the same question as I go to bed every night: how to improve Indian democracy. One epiphany I got: ban all protests. Be 'One Nation, One Opinion'. Why can't we simply lock up any and all dissenters? I know most of you feel this way. And yet, we patriots are helpless, faced with the pseudo-democratic posturing that even certified autocrats can't seem to do without.

The older I get, lesser the patience I have for imported, zero-tariff luxury items like dissent, privacy, and human rights. If I ever become the Supreme Leader of any country, I will give two options to anyone who thinks I'm wrong and they are right. One, agree with me publicly and unequivocally; two, keep applying for bail. People at protest sites are typically on a journey towards option 2, and I'm sorry to say I've known a few in my lifetime.

For democracy's sake
The other day, I got a call from Balu, an anarcho-syndicalist-turned-Trotskyist-turned-corporate honcho-turned-reptile rights activist. "Which is the best place in Delhi to stage a protest," he wanted to know.

"What are your requirements?"

"It should be centrally located," he said. "With ample parking, easy access to cholera-free drinking water, and clean washrooms, preferably stocked with Charmin Ultra Soft toilet paper."

"Is that all?"

"Well," he paused to think. "It would be good if there are decent pubs within walking distance, so we can unwind with a drink or two after a long day of protesting."

"Hold on," I said, entering his parameters on Google.

"Jantar Mantar," I said. "It's the top protest site in Delhi."

"I see," he said. "I once did a major anti-corruption protest there back in 2013, with someone called Thambi Hazare."

"For some reason, I always thought it was Anna Hazare," I said. "How did it go?"

"We won," Balu said. "People became aware. They voted out all corrupt leaders in 2014. Since then India has enjoyed a clean government led by caring politicians who are not at all dynastic or nepotistic."

"Exactly," I said. "So where is the need for protests?"

"Still, some harmless protests are needed to maintain the façade that we are a democracy."

Don't disturb tourists
I wasn't convinced. Even if we do need performative protests, do they have to be in a public place? Jantar Mantar, a tourist attraction, is now listed on Google as a 'protest site'. Its rating of 4.4/5 would have puzzled Maharaja Jai Singh II. As it is, tourist traffic is falling. Now, even the two-three foreigners who come to see Jantar Mantar will go back thinking injustices are rampant in a great country like India. Is that necessary?

History tells us that all bad things – like communism, human rights, MGNREGA – came from protests. That's why the British banned protests in New Delhi. Now even the British are gone. So why do we need protests at all?

But I understand some people are temperamentally protest-prone. They can't help it. Fine. Protest if you must. But then do it in ways that benefit the nation. Protest by paying more tax, or by donating your EPF money to the government. But don't occupy a public space and make a nuisance – that's the old way. There are a thousand new ways that don't require a protest site.

Build your life around injustice
For instance, if you are as great as you think you are, you must have won some award by now – return that award in protest. If you have no awards to return, then work hard to win one, then return it. So many people won Nobel Prizes this month. If you've won any, you could decline it in protest. Or, if you're looking for something easier than the Nobel, you could win an Oscar, like Satyajit Ray did, and turn your acceptance speech into a protest speech that will reverberate around the world.

But if you can't win a Nobel or an Oscar or any other return-worthy award, then shut up and sit down, or take a knee, like the Indian cricket team did. If you can't take a knee because of arthritis, take a boat, like Greta did. And that's what I told Balu also.

"C'mon," he said. "Have you never been to a Bono concert? Surely you know that protesting against injustice can also be fun, with singing, dancing, catching up with old friends?"

"No," I said. "I am not the protesting type. Injustice is a part and parcel of life. If you're smart, instead of protesting it, you'll build your life around injustice."

G. Sampath, the author of this satire, is Social Affairs Editor, The Hindu.

PERSON OF INTEREST

MANJARI CHATURVEDI: *DIDI* TO ALL *QAWWALS*

The dancer pioneered Sufi Kathak to draw attention to Qawwali and began a project to preserve the folk art form

Manjari Chaturvedi has put together a book that tracks the 700-year history of Qawwali.

Manjari Chaturvedi doesn't slot life in boxes and binaries. The Sufi Kathak exponent who will soon release a book on *qawwalis* prefers to dance gracefully in the greys. She lives in a world where Bhakti and Raskhan exist in harmony. Where Hindus and Muslims throng the same shrine to play Holi. Where hit songs like 'Dama Dam Mast Qalandar' bring together in their embrace Lal Shahbaz Qalandar and Jhulelal, one a Sufi mystic, the other a Hindu deity.

The daughter of a space scientist father and Hindi literature scholar mother, she grew up in and was deeply influenced by Lucknow. "Sufi, Kathak, *qawwalis*, *tawaifs* had a big impact on me," she says. "You imbibe it even if it's not taught to you in textbooks." Even as Uttar Pradesh labours furiously to crush its syncretic history, Chaturvedi says the small pockets of musicians she visits still inhabit that old world where Lord Krishna "effortlessly traverses Hinduism and Sufism".

Her introduction to Qawwali music was in 1994 via film director Muzaffar Ali, who had attended one of her performances. Ali took her, a Kathak dancer trained in the strictest traditions of the classical form, to Sufi shrine Dewa Sharif near Lucknow. "I had never heard anything like this. I started listening to the music," says Chaturvedi.

Spinning like the dervishes

Over the next few years, Chaturvedi went down the rabbit hole the old-fashioned way – poring over manuscripts in libraries and on a trip to central Asia, a key centre of Sufism since the medieval age. In 1998, she launched Sufi Kathak as a dance form. She danced in black or white costumes, steering clear of the brighter colours preferred by classical dancers.

Her music and dance no longer paid homage to a god with form; devotion was all about feeling. Kathak's *chakras* (spins) had showcased her technical expertise but in Sufi Kathak, she says, these became a "moving meditation modelled on dervishes". The press was kind but her contemporaries and dance gurus hated the idea of a classical dancer performing to folk music. One guru staged a walkout halfway through her performance.

When Chaturvedi tried to conduct her first seminar on Qawwali 12 years ago, she couldn't find any speakers initially. The seventh edition of the seminar, likely the last, is scheduled for November 1 this year, and has a packed schedule of talks, a photo exhibition, her book release and more.

Stories and self-documenting

Chaturvedi is a repository of Qawwali trivia. Hindi cinema has copied many *qawwalis* sung in Sufi shrines across the country but there's only one instance of a *filmi qawwali* being sung regularly at a shrine, she tells me. Kaifi Azmi's 'Maula Salim Chishti' from *Garm Hawa* (1974) is often sung at the Salim Chishti Dargah in Fatehpur Sikri.

Her new book, *Qawwali: The Call Of Hearts In Love*, tracks the 700-year history of the art form, from Amir Khusro to the experience of listening to *qawwali* in Delhi's bars. The work began 14 years ago after Chaturvedi realised that there was no archive of all this musical richness. "*Qawwals* are mostly illiterate, marginalised musicians, never considered at par with classical singers," she says. "Even their own community doesn't see them as custodians of tradition and history."

Chaturvedi began The Qawwali Project, an initiative to archive and preserve Qawwali through its practitioners, including the powerful self-documentation initiative 'I Am a Qawwal' that allows *qawwals* to tell their stories in their own words.

"I usually merge social issues with the arts so it takes a long time to find sponsors," she says, adding that her book was produced largely due to her own work and the efforts of two photographers, Dinesh Khanna and Mustafa Quraishi. Thanks to sound history collector Amar Nath Sharma, she found a treasure of records by women *qawwals*.

Erasure of the *tawaif*

Chaturvedi's work drew the country's *qawwals* to her. Soon she was connected to many groups in the country, fighting to take them on cultural tours. That's how Wajahat Hussain Badayuni performed at the Royal Festival Hall in London and Hyder Baksh Warsi went to Portugal. She set up a foundation that helps with small needs like medical support and years later, during COVID-19, the system came handy. "I've become everyone's *didi* [elder sister]," she says. "They call me for anything, including filling out visa forms."

This year's Qawwali seminar will be her last, says Chaturvedi. "It's been 14 years of discussions and conversations around Qawwali." She now wants to focus on another passion project, one that began even before her work on Qawwali. It is about how history has misrepresented the region's courtesans. "*Tawaifs* were deliberately removed from performance art history in the post-Independence era by cultural guardians," she says.

"The idea that the *tawaif* was waiting for salvation by marriage and to turn into a 'good woman' was fed to us by Hindi cinema," says Chaturvedi, adding that in her research she found letters written by *tawaifs* who said they didn't have any desire to marry.

"I don't want to be part of someone's harem," one woman wrote. "I teach, I dance. I'm happy." Chaturvedi will ensure we hear their voices, too.

***Priya Ramani** is a Bengaluru-based journalist and the co-founder of India Love Project on Instagram.*

GOREN BRIDGE

Play to admire

East-West vulnerable, South deals

Bob Jones

South made several efforts to gain the information that would enable him to bid a grand slam before settling for six hearts. Partner had four-card heart support, but the rest of the dummy was a disappointment

South found a terrific line of play. He ruffed the opening club lead with the ace of hearts and led the 10 of hearts to dummy's jack. He ruffed another club with the king of hearts and led the eight of hearts to dummy's nine. He ruffed dummy's remaining club with the queen of hearts and cashed the ace of spades. South then led a low spade from his hand! West won but was end-played. He had to lead a spade into the kingjack, a diamond into the ace-queen, or give a ruff-sluff. 12 tricks on any choice. To appreciate declarer's play, imagine other layouts of the spade suit. Had the spades split 3-2, the king of spades would drop the queen, if it hadn't fallen already, and two diamonds would be shed from dummy on the long spades. South could ruff the queen of diamonds in dummy and claim. Should East have four spades, South would win the diamond shift with the ace, lead his two of hearts to dummy, and take the proven spade finesse. Two diamond discards and a diamond ruff would again bring him to 12 tricks. Beautifully played.

NORTH
♠ 6 5 2
♡ J 9 6 4
◇ 10 7 4
♣ K 6 5

WEST
♠ Q 10 8 3
♡ 3
◇ K J 5 3
♣ J 10 9 3

EAST
♠ 9
♡ 7 5
◇ 9 8 6 2
♣ A Q 8 7 4 2

SOUTH
♠ A K J 7 4
♡ A K Q 10 8 2
◇ A Q
♣ Void

The bidding:

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
2♣	Pass	2◇	Pass
2♡	Pass	3♡	Pass
3♠	Pass	4♣	Dbl
4◇	Pass	4♡	Pass
5♣	Pass	5♡	Pass
6♡	All pass		

Opening lead: Jack of ♣

QUIZ

Easy like Sunday morning

What has October 26 ever given us?

Berty Ashley

1 On October 26, 1858, Hamilton Smith received a patent for his machine, which improved on the 'James King' version that had been invented seven years prior. His version included a revolving drum that was able to mimic the action of using hands. What machine, which is now a staple of all homes?

2 On October 26, 1863, the FA was founded when the rules for a certain sport were established. Till then, for centuries, there were no proper rules that governed the play. The oldest of its kind, it now is also a part of UEFA and FIFA. What does 'FA' stand for?

3 October 26, 1901, is the first recorded use of a particular method in crime history. It occurred after a shop was held up in Paris, and the thieves got away from the scene in haste. What 'new' invention did they use to out-pace the police?

4 On October 26, 1918, Cecil Chubb, a wealthy barrister, handed over a prehistoric monument to the British government so that the public could have free access to it. Thought to have been built 5,000 years ago, it is instantly recognisable by its features. What is the name of this monument that references the building material?

5 On October 26, 1972, Edwin Land introduced the very first truly instant version of a popular product at an event in Miami. He went onstage, took out his product and in just 10 seconds produced five copies. What product was this, which is named after the fact that the material aligned light waves?

Filmmaker James Cameron at the 1998 Academy Awards in Los Angeles. (GETTY IMAGES)

6 On October 26, 1972, for the first time, guided tours of this highly controversial place were given by the United States National Park Service. Built on a small island in San Francisco Bay it was one of the most notorious of its kind. What place is this?

7 On October 26, 1976, an Act was passed in the U.K. government to make this country a republic within the Commonwealth. A dual-island Caribbean nation, it is the birthplace of Calypso music, Brian Lara and Dwayne Bravo. Which country is one of the few to have an 'and' in their name?

8 On October 26, 1977, Ali Maow Maalin, a Somali hospital cook, got the diagnosis for a rash he had developed. He was quickly isolated and eventually survived. The WHO and the CDC consider this date to be the eradication of a deadly disease. What disease was eradicated thanks to a globally successful vaccination drive?

9 On October 26, 1984, this movie, directed by James Cameron, was released in the U.S. The story about a woman whose unborn son is destined to lead humanity's resistance against a hostile AI shaped public discourse of technological advancement for years. What is this movie where the most famous line is delivered by a cyborg?

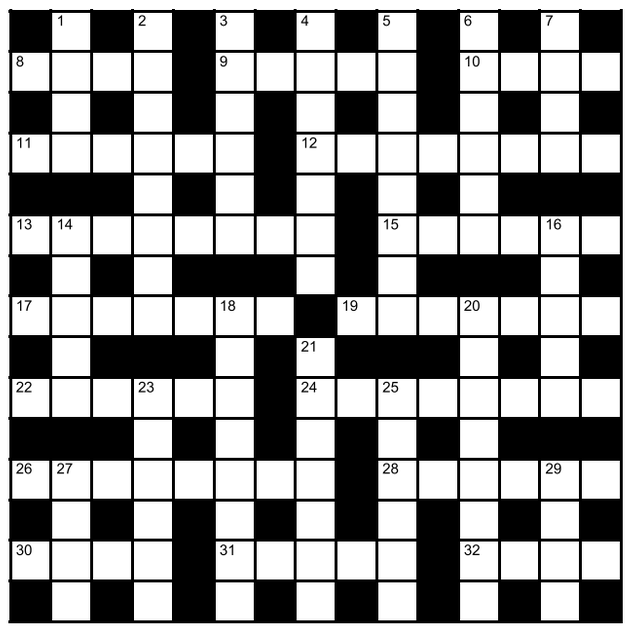
10 On October 26, 2017, Jacinda Ardern was sworn in as prime minister of her country. At the age of 37, she became the world's youngest female head of government. She got acclaim for ensuring that her country successfully contained the COVID virus. Which country did she lead?

A molecular biologist from Madurai, our quizmaster enjoys trivia and music, and is working on a rock ballad called 'Coffee is a Drink, Kaapi is an Emotion'. @bertyashley

Answers

1. Washing machine
2. Football Association
3. A getaway car
4. Stonehenge
5. Polaroid camera
6. Alcatraz Prison
7. Trinidad & Tobago
8. Smallpox
9. *The Terminator*
10. New Zealand

THE HINDU SUNDAY CROSSWORD NO. 27 (Set by Incognito)



Across

8/1 Gobble creature with feather (4,4)
9 Bird gives shelter to one Sesame Street character (5)
10 Aluminium probably sourced initially in mountain range (4)
11 Ms. Merkel's bro left Bangalore building (6)
12 Old hotel accepts garlic preparation for big businessman controlling politics (8)
13 Choke stern gal erroneously (8)
15 False nature wrongly shown around university, in absence of academician (6)
17 Clarify: "Previous girlfriend unattractive" (7)
19 Doctor, he later treated skin (7)
22 Except one, entire entourage initially gets main course (6)
24 oneylender's income from Bury estate (8)
26 Test case may be stored in this? (8)
28 Get away from Spanish headland (6)
30 Indian tribal from Srinagar (4)
31 Sinatra's candid (5)
32 Bedouin, for example, found in Vikarabad (4)

Down

1 See 8 Across
2 When everything is taken into account, fall rate may be adjusted (5,3)
3 Margaret hugs grandmother in Malaysian island (6)
4 Wildly run around chap and remove lid (7)
5 Partly dressed? Used mine wrongly... (4-4)
6 Person with exceptional aptitude sat around vehicle (6)
7 Magnificent record followed by one hundred (4)
14 Container carrying animal poison (5)
16 Addicts sure to be confused before starting to sniff (5)
18 Find yeti roaming and recognise (8)
20 Traitor's taco (8)
21 Date for payment of penalty? Can be a nice period of 24 hours! (4,3)
23 Cars damaged by a large rogue (6)
25 Fine tunes and adjusts waste around end of week (6)
27 Advanced method? Not at home! (4)
29 Fuel from vegetable on a bit of toast (4)

SOLUTION NO. 26

The day the peepal fell

Varun Joshi
varunjoshi55@gmail.com

It was one of those heavy monsoon nights. Suddenly, a loud thud echoed across our colony. At first, I thought it must be a flowerpot that had toppled from a rooftop. Half an hour later, when I checked the society WhatsApp group, the truth unfolded – the grand old peepal tree in the adjacent park had been uprooted.

Standing tall in the centre of the park, it had a wide canopy that had been a green shelter for all – a place where children played under its shade, elders rested on benches, and many offered their prayers. Its branches were an abode to birds. Its fall left a void, as though a guardian of our community had collapsed.

While many in the society casually suggested clearing the logs and "making way for a playground", my wife felt otherwise. To her, the tree was not debris but a living being that deserved a chance. She reached out to NGOs and eventually approached the Mayor's office. Her persistence brought results – calls began to come in from the Municipal Corporation's horticulture team.

The first visit was discouraging. The experts denied that the tree could be straightened. But after a few days and multiple visits, their resolve softened. With compassion and technical expertise, they brought in heavy machinery and attempted the seemingly impossible task of straightening the mighty peepal. Our neighbours, however, were not convinced.But the horticulture team countered with a poignant reminder: "During COVID, people were buying oxygen. These trees give it free, every single day."

The operation took time, patience, and sheer willpower. Our children stood patiently seeing the procedure while ensuring the supply of drinking water with their tiny hands to the workforce. And finally, the peepal stood upright once again, its roots embraced by the earth. Weeks later, as the rains eased and the sun returned, small green shoots began to appear on its branches. What once seemed like a lifeless trunk now breathed with fresh life. We did not forget to profusely thank the horticulture team for the task.

What is lost in a **smart classroom**

Technology enriches but dehumanises human experience; it is time to reimagine educational process with intuition, insight, and creativity

C. Gopinathan Pillai
drcg.pillai@gmail.com

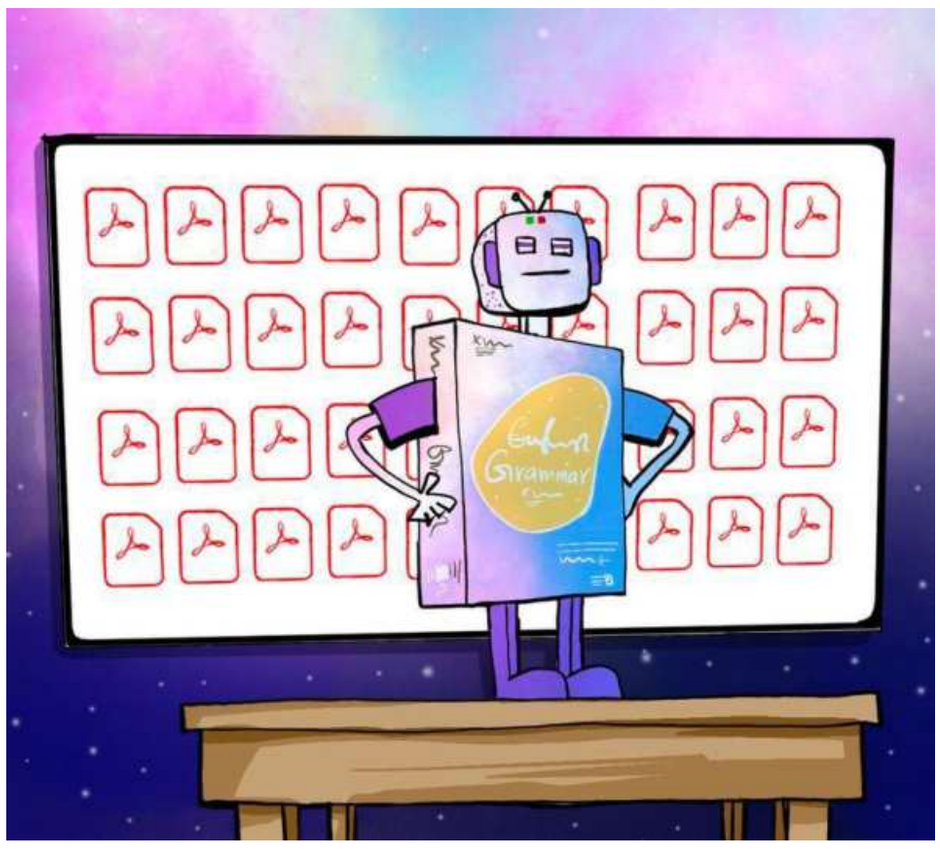


ILLUSTRATION: SREEJITH R. KUMAR

The autumnal sunlight, filtering through the window curtain, woke me up from my midday nap that I have got used to in my post-retirement days. Suddenly, my attention got riveted to the scroll on the TV about the University Grants Commission taking a relook at the digital learning ecosystem to close the disconnect between education and employment. That set me thinking on a lost paradise, the classrooms which discovered, nurtured, and nourished the teacher in me for close to 50 years. Having taught English language and literature to multiple generations across Kerala, I thought it was worthwhile to explore and rediscover the ecstasies and anxieties associated with those days. Besides, it might not be out of place to reflect on the shifting scenes of the classroom dynamics, at a time when artificial intelligence is all set to revamp the teaching and learning process, and robots are getting ready to replace teachers.

Fifty years is a long period, long enough for a tectonic shift in any sphere of human activity. I started off dealing with a generation that was yet to see television. They might not have even heard of Internet, smartphone or artificial intelligence. The boys and girls, mainly from rural and semi-urban areas, were by and large simple and untouched by the surfeit of material comforts. They were traditional and had learnt from adversity.

For them, information technology meant the print medium, radio, telephone, and telegraph. They came to college on foot, by bus, or on bicycles. Having done schooling in the Malayalam medium, most of them struggled to speak in English or follow lectures in the language. Convent education was not common in those days. It was a generation haunted by the spectre of Wren and Martin, the famous authors of *High School English Grammar and Composition*. Obsession with grammar adversely affected their spoken English. However, their written English turned out to be better, which might have stood them in good stead in competitive examinations. Their pronunciation and accent often revealed the influence of the mother tongue. But they were diligent, hard-working, and brimming with enthusiasm. They read and wrote avidly and made full use of the library. Evidently, they had a sense of purpose and knew well that their future depended on their academic performance.

A sea change

Resuming teaching after a few years, I found myself face to face with the so-called Gen Z. That they were netizens and tech-savvy was not enough to unnerve me, though I took pains to make myself less anachronistic. Armed with laptops, tablets, and smartphones, they looked like the quintessential digital natives. I was all admiration for their new-fangled ways, excellent communication skills, deft handling of electronic gadgets, and devil-may-care attitude. They had exorcised the ghosts of Wren and Martin. But what shocked me was their reluctance to explore the library, the lifeline for the earlier generations. Even postgraduate students were no different. They claimed to have everything they needed in the laptop. Their concept of books and reading was shaped by technology, which might be instrumental in moulding their character and outlook to a considerable extent. There was no conventional texts; only PDFs in the class. Stanley Fish, the American theorist, would have rephrased his question, "Is there a text in the class", as "Is there a PDF in the class?" The enticing rustle of paper and the seductive aroma of books were lost on them. I wondered how a not-so-smart teacher like me could survive in a "smart classroom". Eventually, I had to bring out the entire repertoire of my persuasive skills to convince my students that literature did not lend itself to be taught with the aid of educational gadgets. I still doubt if literature can be taught at all.

What is alarming is the breathtaking speed at which new forms of technology transform the educational landscape. AI and robotic devices are all set to replace teachers. Technology but is a double-edged sword

Let imagination flourish

But what is alarming is the breathtaking speed at which new forms of technology transform the educational landscape. AI and robotic devices are all set to replace teachers. We tend to repeat T.S. Eliot's questions, "Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge? Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?" Technology is a double-edged sword. It enriches and at the same time, dehumanises human experience. It is high time we thought about what was lost in the classroom. We need to recalibrate and reimagine the educational process without estranging it from intuition, insight and creativity. Let the digital revolution not precipitate the demise of imagination, and let us not forget that teachers, if they want to survive in the classroom, would have to make themselves unique and do what no robot can mimic.

Nurturing the ties of kinship

Elders can be integrated into the social networks of relatives to provide emotional support and enable them to lead a happy life

N. Rama Rao
ramaraon2014@gmail.com

A few days ago, my grandson who answered the door came running to me saying that an elderly stranger wished to see me. The caller was none other than my uncle's son Kittu from our village. I had to introduce the guest to the boy and explain how he was related to us. With the gradual disappearance of the joint family system, most of the present-day children hardly know any relatives beyond the immediate ones.

Once, when I was on a visit to Atlanta, I happened to take a walk in a park, accompanied by my daughter who lived in the U.S. city. Another walker, a gentleman who appeared to be in his late sixties, stopped for a while as my daughter greeted him. They knew each other as members of their residents' association. Introduction over, the gentleman and I had a brief exchange of our background and nativity which revealed that we were distantly connected, a fact my young daughter did not know.

Though I cannot vouch for a correct answer to the question "How many relatives do you have?", I have learned that there are many connected with me by blood or marriage who are spread far and near. The Census classifies household members by their relationship to heads of their households. But little is known about the number of relatives one has outside one's household.

Blood bond Relatives play a significant role in the lives of one another. (GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK)

Relatives have been playing a significant role in the lives of one another from time immemorial. They always commanded respect and regard in their respective circles. Elders held significant authority and influence within the family structure guiding decisions and providing advice in keeping with traditional practices. I remember my aged aunt wielding more authority in our family than my parents themselves.

On the downside, there could be close relatives with whom your relationships over the years might have witnessed more ebb than flows due to conflicts arising from different perspectives and jealousy. There are families locked in court cases relating to property disputes for years and are not even on talking terms.

Rules and conventions

Certain rules and conventions have stemmed from the belief that relatives exert strong influence over a person. Judges are expected to recuse themselves if they have a conflict of interest, such as a relationship with a lawyer or a party, to ensure a fair trial for all concerned. A visa applicant must declare the particulars of his relatives living in the country for which he is seeking a visa.

Navigating the relationships is an art which should ultimately promote the positive aspects and minimise the negative ones. In the modern world, developing a network of as many well-meaning relatives and friends as possible by a household seems to be a beneficial and welcome move for gaining support, promoting overall wellbeing and building resilience. It would help share information that would come in handy in decision-making in personal, professional and health matters.

It is easier today to develop a network of relatives. Internet, email, smartphones, WhatsApp, video calls, social media and what not, facilitate communication and connection. Social isolation is a major problem and it is one of the most recognised contributors to mental health issues. Many elders who remain alone at home could be integrated into the social networks of relatives and friends to provide emotional support to them and enable them to lead a happy life. In the case of seniors who are not comfortable using digital tools, volunteers could visit them at their homes and create a convivial atmosphere to keep them cheerful.

The networking will go a long way in bringing grandparents and other near relatives closer to children, providing them a sense of belonging, love, and shared experiences through stories, anecdotes and celebrations.

FEEDBACK

Letters to the *Magazine* can be e-mailed separately to mag.letters@thehindu.co.in by Tuesday 3 p.m.

Cover story

Indian airports, though innovative in architectural design with cultural themes, are denser and less seamless than top global hubs. ('Are India's airports ready to take off?'; Oct. 19) While lounges, Wi-Fi, and food options are improving, global airports excel in automation, entertainment and comfort. India's green initiatives and Digi Yatra show progress, but global hubs lead in sustainability and smart systems.
N.S. Reddy

The new airport terminals in India show a quantum leap in infrastructure and design prowess. With international rankings attesting to their architectural excellence, India is finally leaving its stamp on aviation aesthetics. Sustained emphasis on efficiency and consumer experience will help our airports take flight.
S.J. Lestern

India's airports impress with their striking architecture but often falter in their functioning. Gleaming terminals mask bottlenecks in passenger flow, accessibility, and service. True progress lies beyond aesthetic triumphs — where design meets discipline, sustainability meets scalability, and efficiency complements beauty.
Avinashiappan Myilsami

Time for jail reform

India's prisons are overcrowded. ('Life as a political prisoner'; Oct. 19) A majority of jail personnel are chronically stressed by their daily encounters with belligerent and abusive inmates, which psychologically hardens them to the point where ill-treatment of prisoners acquires legitimacy. Major jail reforms in the country are still a far cry.
Kamal Laddha

Deserved recognition

Long sentences are usually tedious to read and test the reader's patience. ('Going beyond the full stop'; Oct. 19). But, when they flow from a litterateur's pen with a rhythm and engage the reader by expressing the inner thoughts and outward actions of the characters fascinatingly, as László Krasznahorkai does in *The Melancholy of Resistance*, the narration becomes gripping and demands attention.
Kosaraju Chandramouli

The article on László Krasznahorkai vividly captured the spirit of this year's Nobel laureate in Literature. The award honours not just a writer but a defiant craftsman of language, one who restores gravitas to the written word in an age ruled by haste.
Vijay Singh Adhikari

City and the goddess

The column brought back nostalgic memories of my stay in Kolkata in the early 90s when the ubiquitous Kali, the fiery goddess, was a sublime presence with her temple in Kalighat always chock-a-block with devotees. ('Growing up with Kali'; Oct. 19) There was always something mysterious and endearing about this goddess that drew her devotees to her like a magnet. For most Bengalis residing in Kolkata, the city is synonymous with the goddess.
C.V. Aravind

MORE ON THE WEB

www.thehindu.com/opinion/open-page

The importance of boredom
All creativity needs some quiet, from which new ideas can arise and flourish
Sudha Vidyasagar

Why we secretly love to stand in queues
They are where stories unfold, strangers bond, tempers flare, and patience, or the lack of it, is revealed
Vivek Gundimi

The burden of endless choices
Too many of them can lead to anxiety, indecision, and dissatisfaction
Vivek Keshri

The book shelf
Here is a new way to categorise books
Chanchala Borah

Contributions of up to a length of 700 words may be e-mailed to: openpage@thehindu.co.in Please provide the postal address and a brief background of the writer. The mail must certify that it is original writing, exclusive to this page. The Hindu views plagiarism as a serious offence. Given the large volume of submissions, we regret that we are unable to acknowledge receipt or entertain queries about submissions. If a piece is not published for eight weeks please consider that it is not being used. The publication of a piece on this page is not to be considered an endorsement by The Hindu of the views contained therein.

Toy story (Clockwise from left) Karthik Vaidyanathan at the recent *Snugglewalas* exhibition in Bengaluru; and the characters of the newly launched *Snugglewalas* series. (SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)

THE VARNAM PLAYBOOK

For craftpreneurs who struggle with design theft and funding, Karthik Vaidyanathan's Channapatna reboot is a lesson on creating a cult brand

Joshua Muyiwa

Two years ago, the introduction of a six-lane Bengaluru-Mysuru Expressway posed an obstacle to the toy shops in Channapatna en route. Travellers rarely stopped by for impulse purchases. Hundreds of brightly coloured handcrafted wooden toys stood unsold. In spite of a GI tag, the demand for the 200-year-old craft has been dwindling owing to lack of innovation and limited access to markets outside the region.

The story is not much different for Bidriware. Government initiative, self-help groups, NGOs, e-tailers – and craftpreneurs, in the past decade, trying to reimagine the art – have supported or sourced from these artisans, exhibited them at urban pop-ups and bazaars, and retailed through social media. One man, however, has reimagined the Channapatna craft for the modern shelf and cracked the code to create a successful business model.

In 2011, Bengaluru-based Karthik Vaidyanathan founded Varnam Craft Collective and, nearly 15 years later, has grown it into a multi-crore business, with retail stores in Bengaluru (Indiranagar, Jayanagar), Mysuru and Goa. But the shift between "a creative passion project" and a craft-based business comes with its share of upheavals and learnings, says Vaidyanathan, the brand's principal designer. He cautions: "One can't work in crafts from the viewpoint of commercial success alone." Instead, he says, "The larger Varnam becomes, the more impact it will be able to have on the livelihood of the artisans." Also, the delicate dance is to "not dilute the essence of the brand for the sake of the business".

Growing roots, branching out

The engineer-turned-communications specialist started Varnam in his late 30s, with a personal investment of ₹2 lakh. He began working directly with seven artisan families in Channapatna – called the Toy Town of India – to create fun and functional takes on this vibrant craft of wooden and lacquerware toys. Think owls dangling as festive lighting; a *kuruvi*, or sparrow, sitting atop a paper-roll holder; pigs transformed into coaster stands, bunnies into salt-and-pepper shakers and so on.

For the first two years, Vaidyanathan would pop up at craft markets across the country before customers tracked down his home address. "They bought Varnam stocks out of my garage," he recalls.

Today, Varnam works with 30 artisan families in Channapatna, and more than 300 artisan families across 11 other craft forms. "But we still aren't a Fabindia," Vaidyanathan quips. "Craft businesses aren't something that venture capitalists give serious consideration to, despite this sector being the second-largest employer in the country."

The whispered reality is that a craft business is 'working-capital intensive'. He says, "It's our biggest struggle. We pay our artisan clusters immediately lest they be crushed." His transparency has resulted in "artisan clusters rarely leaving once included in Varnam's fold". But keeping this business practice alive isn't always sustainable, he agrees.

In spite of public recognition and industry awards, Vaidyanathan says, "we still run month-to-month – we haven't been in the red only in the past three years". They have had a 20% year-on-year growth barring the COVID-19 years.

He attributes the lasting fame to working long enough across industries, to having had "his fair share of reality checks", and to "a know-how honed from thousands of hours of going to retail exhibitions, interacting with sellers/ buyers, the visiting artisans, getting baked in the sun and learning the ropes of the business".

Vaidyanathan prides himself on being "unemotional" in the service of the larger good. He shut down the Chennai store after 16 months of operation. "We realised this isn't a market for our products because it didn't fit into the value system of spending on real-estate, silk saris, diamonds, gold jewellery – things which are long-lasting and have a resale value," he says. "Phenomenal sales during exhibitions in the city" didn't translate to the retail store. Instead, Varnam reopened Bengaluru's Jayanagar store, which was shut down during the pandemic.

Crafting commentary

Staking his path in a competitive market, crowded with copycat brands, called for making changes to his business strategy. Varnam's signature has been Channapatna crafts. Vaidyanathan has diversified his range through a multi-pronged approach while honouring his brand's first craft of choice. In order to claim ownership of his designs, he began to reproduce Varnam's motifs across a range of products. Blockprinted textiles inspired by their Channapatna objects allowed Varnam "to move into apparel and soft home-furnishings". This decision to expand helped "create a memorable brand identity".

Vaidyanathan knew that customers wouldn't return for Channapatna crafts alone. "We make board games with Lambadi women embroiderers, create jewellery with the artisans of Bidri and so on. But Varnam's signature – the Channapatna craft – makes a strong appearance in each of these artisan collaborations: as pawns in the embroidered game-mats or *bidri* work inlaid into a Channapatna lacquer turnery," he says, adding, "Channapatna will always be at the heart of Varnam but we create things around it. It also introduces our customer base to different crafts of the country."

We still aren't a Fabindia. Craft businesses aren't something that venture capitalists give serious consideration to, despite this sector being the second-largest employer in the country

KARTHIK VAIDYANATHAN
Founder and principal designer, Varnam Craft Collective

World-building

By 2027, Vaidyanathan aims to grow Varnam into a ₹5 crore business. In August 2024, he got a ₹2 crore seed fund from two angel investors-cum-designers, Geeta Dipali and Hemant Suthar. It fuelled Varnam's largest growth burst till date. With that they took on a "capital,

labour and logistic-intensive project". This month, Varnam launched *Snugglewalas*: "a collection of [12] anthropomorphic characters who bring to life the different craft traditions of India".

Vaidyanathan has leaned into his storytelling experience from his years in marketing and radio to infuse "emotion" into Varnam's signature motifs. In a sense, he is turning them into toys again. "I've had this clarity: toys with a twist. Toys aren't just for children – everyone likes being playful," he says. "This starting point" has been the singular driving force behind Varnam's identity and finds crystallisation in *Snugglewalas*.

"A parrot in a block-printed cushion cover can be seen in a *panja* weave *dhurrie* and then in the crewel embroidery of Lambadis – and slowly, its quirks will emerge. Say, for instance, that it is a superstitious bird, and loves green chillies. We are hoping this world-building will bond these motifs to the brand," he adds.

After Bengaluru, The Snugglewalas – The Storytellers of Handmade India *travels to Hyderabad, from November 13-17, at Crafts Council of Telangana, Banjara Hills.*

The writer and poet is based in Bengaluru.

Scan the QR code for more on Vaidyanathan and Varnam, on **magazine.thehindu.com**

ILLUSTRATION: ZAINAB TAMBAWALLA

Gogji *for a broken heart*

When relationships die, honour the memories, says Phuphee. And have some fresh turnips, too

It was a late September afternoon. Autumn had taken hold; the earth had shed her vibrant costumes from spring and summer, and was getting ready for some much needed rest. I was sitting on the verandah watching Phuphee pottering about in her kitchen garden. She walked towards me with a small *kraenjul* (wicker basket) full of turnips and a big smile on her face.

'*Waitch sa* [look],' she said, showing me her basket full of turnips.

'*Walle, gogji rogan josh rannao* [come, let's cook turnip *rogan josh*],' she said, walking towards the kitchen. Inside, I watched her perform her magic and turn the humble turnip into a dish fit for a wedding feast. She was nearly done when one of the helpers came in to inform her that a lady was waiting for her. She motioned for me to join her and directed the helper to cook extra rice for lunch.

In Phuphee's room, a woman was waiting. She lived locally. Her name was Asma. She was the headmistress of a small girls school on the outskirts of the village. After greeting her, Phuphee asked her how she could help.

For a while the woman was quiet, but you could see the storm clouds gather in the corners of her eyes until they could no longer be held back and they fell in reams. Phuphee watched her for a while and then slowly got up and went to sit next to her. She put her arm around her and held her close while she cried.

When Asma had exhausted all her tears she spoke. She was married and lived with her husband and two children. She had two brothers whom she loved dearly, but for the past decade or so everything had gone wrong in her relationship with them. She still spoke to the elder one, though he had stopped making any effort to be in her life. While the younger one, whom she had been very close to, had not only stopped speaking to her, but had at different points in time abused her trust and broken her heart.

She told Phuphee it had happened when he got married. She was sure his wife had cast some spell on him or poisoned his ears. Phuphee listened as Asma continued to speak about how she sometimes dreamt about the happier times they had when they were children and how much her heart ached for her brother. She asked Phuphee if she could give her a *taaveez* (talisman) to undo whatever spell had been cast on her brother. Or, if that wasn't possible, could she be given something to make the pain stop.

When Asma had finished, Phuphee called out for the helper and asked her to serve lunch for everyone. Spells could not be broken and hearts cannot be mended on an empty stomach, she said.

The helper served the *gogji rogan josh* with hot rice and all of us had a second helping. As we ate, Phuphee talked about random things – the state of the roads, the weather, and everything that was happening in the world. When we were done, she turned to Asma and said, 'When someone very dear to us does cruel things, unthinkable things, it is natural to look for reasons why. After all, we are not supposed to hurt the people we love, at least not intentionally.'

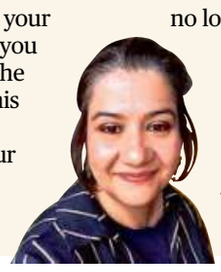
'You know my dearest Asma, of course it is possible that some of the blame can be laid at your sister-in-law's door, but not all of it. Your brother is not a child. He is a grown man with a will of his own, And while you hold your sister-in-law responsible, you must not absolve him of the accountability he has in his actions. Your heart hurts because you have lost your brother. You know, it sometimes happens that people die before they actually die. The brother you had, who was loving and kind, has gone. The person he is now is not your brother in any real sense. The memories you have, hold them close and honour them. Do not ever feel yourself to be weak because you feel hurt or you still feel the love, because it stems from a reality you once lived. You are not deluded, you are human.'

We sat quietly. I had so many questions, but I didn't ask. I hoped Asma would ask Phuphee some more questions, but she didn't. After lunch, they walked to the gate while I watched from the window. Phuphee handed her a small bag and bid her goodbye.

'Did you give her a *taaveez* at the gate?' I asked when she came back.

'I gave her something better,' she said, smiling. 'I gave her some fresh *gogji* she could cook.'

Later that day, I sat thinking about what Phuphee had told Asma and I struggled to make sense of it. Twenty years later, on an autumn day, I too would come to understand that sometimes you can lose people without them dying. In that moment all you could do was acknowledge and honour the love you once felt for a person who, though still physically alive, was dead in every other way. And despite the confusion that ensued this terrible situation, you had to honour the person you once loved and grieve the person no longer present.



***Saba Mahjoor**, a Kashmiri living in England, spends her scant free time contemplating life's vagaries.*